

The Rational and the Irrational in Mannheim's Sociology of Knowledge

Yoshio CHIBA

In Mannheim's sociology of knowledge problems concerning the relation of the rational and the irrational are discussed from three aspects.

The first aspect concerns the methodological rationalism and irrationalism (or anti-rationalism). The former means the analytical method getting its model from natural sciences. The latter means the method of "Verstehen" or interpretation, which comprehends the parts from the totality. In early days Mannheim took up the position of the anti-rationalism. But later, in his sociology of knowledge, he criticised both. He took the third way, namely the dialectical method, which was thought to be situated in the middle of the rational and irrational method and to synthesize them. It was parallel to his standpoint not to support either the political progressives or the conservatives. He located himself also in the third way, i. e. in the standpoint of "the socially unattached intelligentsia".

The second aspect is the problem of the irrational will in the social and historical cognitions. This will means the collective and unconscious tendencies appearing in political movements most clearly. It is a basis for the social and historical cognitions. And this gives them a nature called "social determination (Seinsverbundenheit)" and perspectivity. It is a main task of his sociology of knowledge to investigate the social origin of the social and

historical cognitions and to overcome the epistemological problems arising from this origin.

Thirdly, in “ Ideology and Utopia ”, there appears the problem concerning the relation of the politics and the science. For Mannheim the politics means a world-creating, history-creating behavior. And it can exist only in “a room for the irrational behavior”. The science is concerned with clarifying and controlling the irrational. He tried to combine the politics and the science by means of bringing up the political knowledge into the sphere of the science. But contrary to his wishes, the combination of the two resulted in the disappearance of the utopia, history and politics, which was caused by the science. He falls into an unsoluble dilemma. For he commits the rationalization of the irrational as a scientist on the one hand, and also esteems the irrational elements in the politics that have power to create a new history as a historicist on the other. He tried to synthesize the rational and the irrational, but he could not accomplish it in the end.